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Seaborne trade and the commercialisation of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Gaelic Ulster

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Abstract

This study considers the frequently stated claim that the economy of Gaelic-speaking lordships in Ulster during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was predominately pastoral and uncommercialised, by drawing on a variety of sources not usually combined. It proposes that the increased European demand for fish and the growth of the fish industry across northern Europe played a crucial role in stimulating trade between the coastal areas of Ulster on the one hand, and Britain and continental Europe on the other. This led to the establishment of permanent markets and towns, which joined at least two new inland towns in the southern parts of the province, bringing about a commercial presence in most of the Ulster lordships before 1600. Gaelic lords consolidated this development by building castles and friaries at these fixed trading places.

Introduction

Anyone setting out to give an account of trade in the past faces problems of definition and methodology within the two disciplines concerned—archaeology and history. The very word ‘trade’ masks a range of activities, motives and effects. For the purposes of this article, ‘trade’ may be defined as the activity of the exchange of goods, ‘commerce’ as the system organising this activity and ‘commercialisation’ as the spread of commerce through society; these are arranged in a hierarchy of complexity. Where we have more evidence, we may write with greater confidence on the level of complexity, mindful of the fact that it can be seen as an argument (or judgement) as to the relative complexity of individual past societies. There is a difference between having simple, anecdotal evidence of trade taking place and estimating how it might have affected a society. Both disciplines try to negotiate this challenge, but in different ways. The archaeologist, who argues from artifacts and built structures, tends to rely on both the volume of the artifacts, but more securely on the number and nature of the structures, whether houses or shops, to demonstrate the existence of trade. This achieved, he or she will examine the agglomeration of settlements and their siting as evidence for commerce. Economic historians, striving to escape from anecdotes about trade to estimate the extent of commerce, look to the documents of regulation and exchange to understand the system of commerce, if any, which lay behind the evidence; ideally the documents will include regular lists and records, such as Customs receipts, of goods traded. None of the evidence which we have meets these requirements in isolation, but by bringing together evidence from differing sources, we may make a useful start on addressing the problem.

Behind the explanations given by historians and archaeologists lie models of how they imagine the commerce to have worked, and from these models they will identify particular traits as proof. The result tends to stress the interpretation of one particular item beyond the weight it can bear. The difficulties that this process produces are highlighted by the problems of coinage and barter. These are often opposed, with barter seen as the more primitive method; its existence can even be used pejoratively when describing past societies, and ‘progress’ to coin-using identified as a crucial threshold from trade to commerce. To the medievalist in particular, this distinction is hard to sustain. Coin use was not prevalent during the Middle Ages. The value of the smallest coin was

greater than the cost of many daily needs: a loaf of bread cost less than a penny, or even a farthing. A penny could not be used in buying a loaf because there was no means of giving change; many such transactions must have been done through informal credit and barter. In the early medieval period much of the coinage may have been used for taxation not commerce. Nor were barter systems pure. Specific goods could become a nominal currency. Legal tracts in early medieval Ireland notoriously rated wealth in terms of cows; during the later Middle Ages in Iceland this was at various times rated in terms of lengths of woven cloth ('wadmal') and dried cod; whereas in Galway, the unit was hides.¹ The other evidence often seen as a key indicator of the difference between trade and commerce is the town. These again are notoriously difficult to define; the existence of a charter is a factor of the organisation of government not commerce; for the archaeologist, how do we tell a commercial town from an agricultural village? The two commonly merge.²

The standard studies of trade in medieval Ireland, by Timothy O'Neill, and Wendy Childs and O'Neill,³ are each excellent in their own way but have two limitations, partly derived from their sources. Their approach is essentially anecdotal; they cite individual instances of trade which took place in the port towns of the south-east during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, rather than describing a system. Their focus is the passage of goods in and out of Ireland and they are less interested in the commercial structure behind the ports, providing the basis for trade. The trade they discuss is organised according to the commercial system of continental Europe and England, around the corporate, chartered town and controlled market. This has riveted the idea of trade to the institutions of the English settlement. Archaeologists have followed the same path, focusing on the larger port towns, while paying less attention to the smaller and inland towns; they cannot find the goods exported, of course, so they discuss Irish trade more in terms of imports. Equally, when rural settlement has been studied, it has largely been from a structural point of view, how the estates were organised, rather than the resources that they exploited or the goods produced.⁴

The emphasis on the difference between the two sets of lordship (the 'two nations' idea) has inhibited work on commerce in Ireland as a whole.⁵ Towns, whose lords issued the charters which defined them, were deemed to be solely English. As a result, when it was noted, for example, that seven merchants from Drogheda in the mid-fifteenth century were granted safe conduct to trade in O'Neill's territory of the Fews (Co. Armagh),⁶ the possibility that they were drawing their Gaelic-speaking hinterlands into a commercial network was not pursued. The study of Gaelic lordships, started in the 1970s and 1980s by K. W. Nicholls and Katharine Simms, repeated the traditional political and institutional emphasis of earlier historians, and this has largely

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¹ Bruce Gelsinger, *Icelandic enterprise: commerce and economy in the Middle Ages* (Columbia, SC, 1981), 34–8; M. J. Blake (ed.), *Blake family records, 1300 to 1600: a chronological catalogue with copious notes and genealogies of many branches of the Blake family* (London, 1902), 39–41.

² Christopher Dyer, 'Towns and villages in the Middle Ages: how do you tell the difference?', *Medieval Settlement Research Group: Annual Report* 8 (1993), 7–8.

³ Timothy O'Neill, *Merchants and mariners in medieval Ireland* (Dublin, 1987); Wendy Childs and Timothy O'Neill, 'Overseas trade', in Art Cosgrove (ed.), *A new history of Ireland: II. Medieval Ireland 1169–1534* (Oxford, 1987), 492–524.

⁴ Linda Doran and James Littleton (eds), *Lordship in medieval Ireland* (Dublin, 2007); James Littleton and Tadhg O'Keefe (eds), *The manor in medieval and modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2005); K. D. O'Connor, *The archaeology of medieval rural settlement in Ireland*, Discovery Programme Monographs 3 (Dublin, 1998).

⁵ For the two-nations controversy, see Steven G. Ellis, 'More Irish than the Irish themselves? The "Anglo-Irish" in Tudor Ireland', *History Ireland* 7:1 (1999), 22–6; K. W. Nicholls, 'Worlds apart? The Ellis two-nation theory on late medieval Ireland', *History Ireland* 7:2 (1999), 22–6; Steven G. Ellis, 'Racial discrimination in late medieval Ireland', in Guðmundur Hálfðanarson (ed.), *Racial discrimination and ethnicity in European history* (Pisa, 2003), 21–32.

⁶ Andrew Lynch, 'A calendar of the reassembled register of John Bole, Archbishop of Armagh, 1457–71', *Seanchas Ardmhacha: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society* 15 (1992), 113–85: 129.

continued.⁷ Nicholls has drawn attention to the evidence for trade and towns, such as Cavan, in Gaelic lordships although he also described the same society as semi-nomadic. These were followed by a number of studies of particular Gaelic lordships: Mary O'Dowd on Sligo, and Patrick J. Duffy on Monaghan are two of the most prominent. However, like the studies of individual English lordships, they concentrate on the pyramidal organisation of tenancies and estates, rather than the lordship's resources. Their resources are addressed by Colm Lennon, although his account of Gaelic Irish trade is still anecdotal, relating incidents which show that such trade existed, without ascribing it to any system other than an extension of the urban-based Anglo-Irish lordships' commerce.⁸

There has been a recent shift away from this approach in two ways. The first is to combine a documentary approach with the archaeological and topographical study of settlement patterns and resources. The second is to give greater weight to direct seaborne trade between Gaelic Irish lordships and communities, and the world beyond Ireland. In the case of north Donegal, Máire Ní Loinsigh has attempted not only to map the land holdings, but also to relate the siting of castles, as seats of lordships, to the lands which they controlled.⁹ One of the results of this is to highlight the fact that the castles were strongly associated with the coast and landing places along it. This has been taken further by Connie Kelleher and by Colin Breen in his article on the coastal landscape in Irish lordship.¹⁰ The latter has provided a brief but wide-ranging survey, providing examples of the impact of fishing on the economy, of the types of fish caught, and of the boats used. However, he does not describe any systematic organisation of the activities he notes, nor does he propose one, and he makes no clear distinction between different parts of Ireland stating that 'A number of hypotheses and generalizations have been put forward in the hope of future research'.¹¹ This leaves the way open for those who still see Gaelic lordship as essentially rural and uninterested in engaging in commercial activity. Two recent quotations will show that this view still persists. According to K. D. O'Connor, medieval Gaelic society 'continued to manifest characteristics that foreign observers at least would have interpreted as archaic. The economy remained largely pastoral, and barter, especially in cattle, was the most frequent method of business transaction'.¹² Even more extreme is the description by Simon Kingston of the society of Ulster and the Western Isles in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: 'in general the economy of northern and eastern Ulster remained more mobile and pastoral than those of other Gaelic communities,...the Bann fishery was an important asset but was worked principally by the English and Anglo-Irish'.¹³

This article seeks to pursue the discussion, both further and more systematically, by focusing on one part of the island, the Gaelic-speaking lordships of Ulster. Its aim is to assemble evidence for trade and commerce in the lordships of the province and then to attempt to identify the systems of commerce implied by them. Its subject is the maritime, commercial trade in fish

⁷ K. W. Nicholls, *Gaelic and gaelicised Ireland in the Middle Ages*, 2nd edition (Dublin, 2003); K. W. Nicholls, 'Gaelic society and economy', in Cosgrove (ed.), *A new history of Ireland*, 397–438; Katharine Simms, *From kings to warlords: the changing political structure of Gaelic Ireland in the later Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, Suff., 1987).

⁸ Patrick J. Duffy, 'Social and spatial order in the MacMahon lordship of Airghialla in the late sixteenth century', in Patrick J. Duffy, David Edwards and Elizabeth FitzPatrick (eds), *Gaelic Ireland c. 1250–c. 1650: land, lordship and settlement* (Dublin, 2001), 115–37; Mary O'Dowd, 'Gaelic economy and society', in Ciaran Brady and Raymond Gillespie (eds), *Natives and newcomers: essays on the making of Irish colonial society, 1534–1641* (Dublin, 1986), 120–47; Mary O'Dowd, *Power, politics and land; early Sligo 1568–1688* (Belfast, 1991); Colm Lennon, *Sixteenth century Ireland; the incomplete conquest* (Dublin 1994).

⁹ Máire Ní Loinsigh, 'An assessment of castles and land ownership, in late medieval north Donegal', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* 57 (1994), 145–58.

¹⁰ Connie Kelleher, 'The Gaelic O'Driscoll lords of Baltimore, Co. Cork', in Doran and Littleton (eds), *Lordship in medieval Ireland* (Dublin, 2007), 130–59; Colin Breen, 'The maritime cultural landscape in Gaelic Ireland', in Duffy, Edwards and FitzPatrick (eds), *Gaelic Ireland c. 1250–c. 1650*, 418–35.

¹¹ Breen, 'The maritime cultural landscape', 435.

¹² O'Connor, *Archaeology of medieval rural settlement in Ireland*, 74.

¹³ Simon Kingston, *Ulster and the Isles in the fifteenth century: the lordship of Clan Domhnaill of Antrim* (Dublin, 2003), 21.

between Ireland and the countries beyond it. As such, it is not concerned with fishing as a topic in its own right and, therefore, not with the valuable work on littoral and intertidal exploitation of fish carried out, by Breen, Kelleher and Thomas McErlean.¹⁴ These primarily study the internal economy of the lordships, in which fishing was important; but the consumption was local, not for trade. It will do so on the basis of the idea that two models of commerce should be applied. The first of these we term ‘the North Atlantic system’. This was based on the trade of fish across the Northern and North-Western littoral of Europe, from the North Sea to Icelandic waters. It was not a coin-based system, nor did it necessarily use fixed and permanent towns. The second model of commerce, based on towns and coinage and the one traditionally used in descriptions of medieval Ireland, we may term the Anglo–continental one; it might have existed in Gaelic Ulster. This article will combine the evidence for these features along the boundaries between Ulster and the English lordships to the east and south. It is important to bear in mind that the two systems are models for our use, to show the scale of variation possible in the means of commerce; they may not have been mutually exclusive. Societies might combine the two or one might move towards the other: most probably the more informal North Atlantic model might see its impermanent landing places grow into what could be described as towns. In either case, this opened up the possibility of economic opportunities for the Gaelic lordships of Ulster and we should consider the impact it may have had on the power of the lords and the way in which they wielded it. In the terms defined above, we are moving from the evidence for trade, essentially anecdotal, to the evidence for commerce, the system used to organise it. The extent of commercialisation of Gaelic society is a separate topic.

The article proceeds by bringing together evidence from a variety of sources to test the two models of commerce, or their combination. The first part focuses on describing the North Atlantic system of commerce (which has not previously been used), followed by an examination of evidence, of maps and lists of places, especially havens, for the possibility that foreign fishing vessels found their way reliably and repeatedly along the coast of Ulster to Co. Donegal in particular; this was an essential prerequisite of commerce. This leads to a consideration of the evidence of topography (by land and sea) and to fieldwork to identify sheltered deep-water anchorages linked to the open sea, which could have been places of trade. The next stage is to examine contemporary information about commerce and settlement at these sites and to look for evidence that they were part of a system. It is possible that the sites may have started as places of trade alone but may not have remained as such. They could develop in either or both of two ways. They could become fixed places of regular commerce, marked by the presence of regular markets, which would require the existence of a class of professional traders to serve them. They might also have attracted the attention of lords who would want to control and benefit from the trading places—Ní Loingsigh’s work suggested that castles might be related to seaborne trade.

The North Atlantic system of commerce and the Ulster fish trade

The fish trade and the system of commerce conform quite closely to a pattern found more widely in the North Atlantic periphery—that is in the Western and Northern Isles of Scotland, the Faroes, Iceland and the provinces of Trøndelag, Hålogaland and Finnmark in Norway.¹⁵ In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the main product of trade—dried fish—was brought from various northern and western coastal regions to the staple port of Bergen by Scandinavian sailors. When, during the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the staple system began to break down, the trade and the number of ships engaged in the North Atlantic trade grew considerably. By 1528 a total of 149 vessels from the east coast of England (more than a third of the English fleet)

¹⁴ Breen, ‘The maritime cultural landscape’; Kelleher, ‘The Gaelic O’Driscoll lords of Baltimore’; Thomas McErlean, Rosemary McConkey and Wes Forsythe, *Strangford Lough: an archaeological survey of the maritime cultural landscape* (Belfast, 2002).

¹⁵ Arned Nedkvitne, *The German Hansa and Bergen 1100–1600* (Cologne, 2014), 402; M. F. Gardiner, ‘The character of commercial fishing in Icelandic waters in the fifteenth century’, in J. Barrett and D. Orton (eds), *Cod and consequences: the archaeology and history of medieval sea fishing* (Oxford, forthcoming).

went to fish and trade in Iceland.¹⁶ At the same time the number of German vessels going to Iceland also grew, leading to competition among foreign merchants for dried fish, and in 1532 to violent confrontation between English and Hanse sailors.¹⁷ Trade in Shetland also developed in the sixteenth century, though it was always on a smaller scale than Iceland.¹⁸ Commerce in the Faroes was even smaller, reflecting a population which may have only numbered 5,000 in 1400.¹⁹ Demand for fish was undoubtedly increasing across Europe in the later fifteenth century, and Maryanne Kowaleski has argued that new methods of curing fish allowed the fishermen to stay at sea longer and operate further from home. Equally, adoption of these methods by native fishermen, where wind-drying was not possible, allowed fish to be stored for sale.²⁰

There were very few ports as we would recognize them in the North Atlantic periphery in the sixteenth century. Bergen in central Norway uniquely had wharfs, warehouses and accommodation for visiting traders.²¹ Most harbours were simply protected anchorages at which ships could be safely moored in deep water. Goods were moved on shore and to the ship on small boats, so a gently shelving beach was required on which they could land. The facilities on shore were rudimentary. In Iceland, the Faroes and Shetland, small buildings, commonly referred to as booths, were constructed, either in vernacular style or in imported materials, in which goods for import and export could be stored.²² Some booths also provided accommodation for a factor who was responsible for sales, but the crew might stay on board the ship while it was at anchor. Merchant ships often carried victuals for the whole voyage, since it was not always possible to obtain suitable food on the Atlantic islands and they had to be largely self-sufficient. They could not carry adequate quantities of freshwater for washing, cooking and drinking, however, and so this was obtained locally. The Dutch Loch in Papa Stour, Shetland, is so named from the *Deutsch* ('German') merchants who took water from it for their ships anchored in Hamna Voe.

The essentials for a port were that it had a protected anchorage and was recognised by both incoming traders and local people as a place for commerce. Trade operated most successfully if it took place on a regular cycle with ships returning annually to the same places at about the same time every year. It is apparent from Shetland that many traders frequented the same ports decade after decade and became part of the local community.²³ The merchants knew the markets and the ships' captains knew the approaches to the anchorages in the North Atlantic and the position of the skerries. The ships waited at the anchorages for the whole summer while they accumulated a cargo from the local fishermen. The Hanse merchants in Iceland, Shetland and Norway also practised a system of credit by which they provided goods in return for future sales of fish, a procedure which ensured that local fishermen would continue to supply them. The system of exchange operated almost entirely without money on a barter basis. Hanse merchants kept records of credit and debt.²⁴ The exchange rate in the Norse islands and coastal regions was fixed, obviating the need for

¹⁶ Björn Þorsteinsson, 'Henry VIII and Iceland', *Saga-Books of the Viking Society* 15 (1957–61), 67–101: 74.

¹⁷ Þorsteinsson, 'Henry VIII and Iceland', 80–3.

¹⁸ J. H. Ballantyne and Brian Smith (eds), *Shetland documents 1195–1579* (Lerwick, 1999), no. 140[Can a page number be provided?].

¹⁹ S. V. Arge and N. Mehler, 'Adventures far from home: Hanseatic trade with the Faroe Islands', in H. Harnow, D. Cranstone, P. Belfords and L. Høst-Madsen (eds), *Across the North Sea: late historical archaeology in Britain and Denmark c. 1500–2000 AD* (Odense, 2012), 176–8.

²⁰ Maryanne Kowaleski, 'The expansion of the south-western fisheries in late medieval England', *Economic History Review* 53 (2000), 429–54: 449–50.

²¹ A. E. Herteig, 'The medieval harbour of Bergen', in G. Milne and B. Hobley (eds), *Waterfront archaeology in Britain and northern Europe*, Council for British Archaeology research report 41 (London, 1981), 80–7; H. Wiberg, 'The Hanseatic settlement at Bryggen', in Ingvild Øye (ed.), *Bergen and the German Hansa* (Bergen, 1994), 53–7.

²² Natascha Mehler, 'Thing-, Markt- und Kaufmannsbuden im westlichen Nordeuropa', *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Archäologie des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit* 24 (2012), 71–82: 74–7.

²³ G. MacDonald, 'More Shetland tombstones', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 69 (1934–5), 27–48: 35–6.

²⁴ Nedkvitne, *The German Hansa and Bergen 1100–1600*, 402–05; A. E. Hofmeister, 'Das Schuldbuch eines Bremer Islandfahrers aus dem Jahre 1558', *Bremisches Jahrbuch* 80 (2001), 20–50.

individual bargains to be struck.²⁵ This ensured a degree of stability, and allowed value to be ascribed to goods, a process which was particularly difficult between different cultures. Commerce could operate therefore entirely successfully without recourse to coinage, but using flexible credit which was granted by the incoming merchants.²⁶ Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the North Atlantic economy was the development of nominal systems of currency. A nominal currency is one which relates value to a widely used commodity. This does not mean that all debts had to be redeemed in those commodities, but they provided a common reference against which value could be measured. It was also essential that the local population produced a surplus for exchange. The economy of the North Atlantic fringe was directed towards self-sufficiency and the provision of such tribute or rent as was required. Production for exchange necessitated increased production of dried fish or cloth, or at least the ability to supply more if the opportunities for trade arose.²⁷

The studies that we have used to define the North Atlantic system are based on English and German merchants and seamen, but it was also used by men from the Basque country when they began to exploit the fishing (and whaling) grounds of the North Atlantic.²⁸ M. M. Barkham shows how the Basques used the same practices when fishing off the Irish coast. They fitted out ships to undertake fishing voyages, where they would stay for extended periods, catching and processing the fish for sale on return. He quotes the example of a voyage of the *Santa Marina* from the port of Lequeito in the Basque Country in 1511.²⁹ The ship was to sail in June, firstly to La Rochelle in western France to take on salt, and then to proceed to ‘the island of Aran’ where it would use six small boats to catch hake and sardines until Christmas, when it would return. The Basques concentrated on two parts of the Irish coast: Baltimore and the south-west, and Killybegs and the north-west, catching principally cod and hake which they dried, either in Ireland or in Spain.

Just as the fish trade changed over time, so too did its organisation in response to the species of fish caught. The main species caught within the northern islands and coasts of the Norwegian–Danish kingdom, and the Northern Isles of Scotland were white fish: cod and ling. The fish were caught with long lines from small boats. To preserve them, they could be slit open, eviscerated and dried in the wind, particularly in the winter when temperatures were low and there was little chance of harm from blow flies. Catching and drying fish was a slow process, but if many of the white fish were caught and preserved by locals, they would accumulate the fish to trade when foreign boats came in the summer. Cod was also found in Irish waters—in the open sea beyond the mouth of the River Foyle, for example—but it does not seem to have been a major catch in the more southerly waters.³⁰ Wind-drying was also adopted in Ireland, though probably in combination with salting: the use of rocks for drying is mentioned in a list of dues payable at Ardglass in the north-east and even in ports as far south as Baltimore.³¹

²⁵ Jón Þorkelsson (ed.), *Diplomatarium Islandicum* (16 vols, Copenhagen and Reykjavík, 1857–1972), vol. 4, no. 337[Can a page no. be provided?]; Gelsing, *Icelandic enterprise*, 39–43.

²⁶ In addition to the examples cited above, see the account of Otto Meyer, a German merchant operating in Shetland: Shetland Archives, D12/110/9, [Detail of archival material: if a letter, this will be ‘M. Gardiner to T.E. MacNeill’. If it’s a written record, it’ll be ‘Diary entry of M. Gardiner’], [Add date].

²⁷ Helgi Þorláksson, ‘King and commerce: the foreign trade of Iceland in medieval times and impact of royal authority’, in Steinar Imsen (ed.), *The Norwegian domination and the Norse world c. 1100–c. 1400* (Trondheim, 2010), 149–73: 158.

²⁸ M. M. Barkham, ‘The Spanish–Basque Irish fishery and trade in the sixteenth century’, *History Ireland* 9:3 (2001), 12–15; Karin Schüller, ‘Special conditions of the Irish–Iberian trade during the Spanish–English War (1585–1604)’, in Enrique García Hernán, Óscar Recio Morales, Bernardo José García García and Miguel Angel de Bunes Ibarra (eds), *Irlanda y la monarquía Hispánica: Kinsale, 1601–2001: guerra, política, exilio y religión* (Madrid, 2002), 450.

²⁹ Barkham, ‘The Spanish–Basque Irish fishery’, 14.

³⁰ H. C. Hamilton, E. G. Atkinson and R. P. Mahaffy (eds), *Calendar of state papers relating to Ireland, of the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary and Elizabeth* (11 vols, London, 1860–1912), vol. 10 (1600–01), 92.

³¹ British Library (BL), Harleian MS. 37,556, rental and survey of the property of Gerald fitz Gerald, ninth earl of Kildare, f. 94v.; John O’Donovan (ed.), *Miscellany of the Celtic society* (Dublin, 1849), 104; James H. Barrett, ‘Fish trade in Norse Orkney and Caithness: a zooarchaeological approach’, *Antiquity* 71 (1997), 616–38: 619–20.

Herring and salmon were more important catches in Ireland. Herring are caught in nets at their offshore spawning grounds but they deteriorate rapidly after they are caught and need to be gutted and then salted or smoked quickly. The crew of foreign vessels might spend the time while waiting to accumulate fish by trade also catching fish themselves, in which case they used salt because they did not have the time or the facilities to dry the catch.³² If they were lucky in their catch, they would not need to stay long and their demands of a shore station would be largely for short-term victualling and places for drying nets; natural fibres rot quickly if they are kept wet. Local fishermen, if they participated, would have needed to buy salt for the preservation of their catch. Within Ulster and Connacht, herring seem to have been caught particularly around the island of Aran and Sligo on the west coast, and in the Irish Sea from Ardglass to Carlingford in the north-east.

The north coast of Ulster was dominated by salmon fishing, apart from small amounts of herring in Lough Swilly in the north-west.³³ Salmon were caught in river estuaries in the late spring and summer as they came up to spawn; netting them as they bunched at an obstacle such as rapids. Foreign seamen could not do this, for they did not own or know the land. The fish must have been caught by the locals who owned the river banks and knew the pools. However, they would have had to buy salt (or, perhaps, wine vinegar) from foreign boats to preserve the fish.³⁴ However, no one can catch fish to order. Each river has two main runs: the larger salmon which have spent two or more years at sea and the smaller grilse which have spent only one year away. The larger fish arrive earlier, centring on April or May, the grilse later, peaking in June to August. Within this there are a number of variables, starting with how favourable the year has been at sea, and how many have survived to return in the two different populations of spring salmon and grilse. Conditions then vary according to the topography of the river and the season. In a small river with a bar at the mouth, like the Bush, the fish will need a spate to provide the depth of water they need to get into the river. They may then be held at an obstacle if the river level drops, making them vulnerable to netting in a pool as they wait for the level to rise. A large river, like the Bann, will suffer less from these vagaries; the run will be more predictable but the fish may be harder to catch without more elaborate barriers. It may have been some time before a visiting ship could gather a full cargo, meaning a greater demand for food and recreation. It was said that a ship of 40 or 60 tons could amass a cargo of salmon in the Bann in two months and a Bristol ship was at Assaroe for that period loading with the same cargo in the 1530s.³⁵ However, on some occasions goods may have already been stored in readiness for the merchants' arrival. A witness in 1556 noted that he was sailing to Lough Swilly where he understood that a number of barrels of salmon were ready to be collected.³⁶ As a result, the effects of salmon fishing penetrated further into the countryside around the trading base than with a herring fishery. There were other specialist fisheries, such as that off Portrush where dogfish and rays were caught by Breton fishermen.³⁷

³² Gardiner, 'The character of commercial fishing'.

³³ J. S. Brewer and W. Bullen (eds), *Calendar of the Carew manuscripts preserved in the archiepiscopal library at Lambeth* (6 vols, London, 1867–73), vol. 1, 85, 208–09; Hamilton, Atkinson and Mahaffy, *Calendar of state papers relating to Ireland*, vol. 10, 92.

³⁴ Deputy Keeper of the Records (ed.), *Calendar of patent rolls, Henry IV* ([? vols], [London, 1399–1401][This period should cover the publication of all volumes.]), vol. 1, 248 and 260; C. Read, 'English foreign trade under Elizabeth', *English Historical Review* 29 (1914), 515–24: 522 refers to salt salmon in a record of c. 1580.

³⁵ The National Archives (TNA), SP63/214, [Detail of archival material], [Add date] f. 73v., although ostensibly referring to the Bann, the reference to Assaroe suggests it may be confusing that river with the River Erne. Record Commission, *State papers during the reign of Henry the Eighth published under the authority of his majesty's commission* (11 vols, London, 1830–52), vol. 3, 142.

³⁶ John C. Appleby (ed.), *A calendar of material relating to Ireland from the High Court of Admiralty examinations 1536–1641* (Dublin, 1992), no. 59[Page no.?].

³⁷ C. W. Russell and John P. Prendergast (eds), *Calendar of state papers relating to Ireland, of the reign of James I* (5 vols, London 1872–80), vol. 4, 225.

Navigation and knowledge

Our question here is whether in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries foreign sailors knew enough of the coastline of the north-west and north of Ireland, from Sligo to Carrickfergus, to be confident sailing there and back. The aim of modern charts, pilot guides and other navigation aids is to make it possible for someone to travel across the sea, even if they have not made that journey before. This was simply not practical before the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries: neither the means for establishing fixed points in the ocean, nor the means for measuring speed or direction accurately existed. As a result, it was impossible to give sailors the information required to work out routes or to cross long distances without sea or land marks. Instead, a navigator had to rely on coasting within sight of land, which was risky because of rocks but better than having no certain course. Experience following well-known routes may make up for this. The experience consists of learning a sequence of navigation marks along the coast, usually headlands, estuaries and inlets, along with mountains prominent from the sea. As he approached and passed these marks, the experienced captain could estimate his progress along his route. Havens and ports are not always easily identifiable from the sea; experience would tell whereabouts within the list of marks they lay.

The portolan charts are our first useful indicator of the state of knowledge of navigating to or around Ireland, by men who came there from Europe from the early fourteenth to the mid-sixteenth centuries. T. J. Westropp lists and gives details of some 26 portolans, dating from 1300 to 1569, which portray Ireland and which have, as he discusses, particular issues relating to them.³⁸ The most important of these was how the knowledge they record was compiled, what it represented (allowing for the vagaries of spelling in the past, we cannot be sure if all the names are reliable) and how it was meant to be used; all we have to work with are places named on each chart, around a shape meant to represent the island of Ireland. There are a number of principal places, recorded (in different spellings but in the same order) in around ten charts. These are: 'Comincedela' (ten), 'Aran' (ten), 'Cape Seligra' (nine), 'Tyrconnell islands' (ten), 'Bann' (ten), 'Portrush' (eleven), 'Dunseverick' (ten) and 'Moneth' (eleven). The first question is of identification, as 'Comincedela', 'Cape Seligra', 'Tyrconnell islands' and 'Moneth' are not immediately recognisable. 'Comincedela' is never found on the same chart as Teelin, or Cape Teelin; they seem to be alternate names for the same headland. 'Cape Seligra' is probably (as Westropp suggested) Bloody Foreland, the extreme north-west point of Ireland. The 'Tyrconnell islands' do not appear on any portolan along with Tory (plural to include the neighbouring Inishbofin, Inishdooley and Inishbeg); which suggests again, that they are probably alternates. Westropp identifies 'Moneth' with Bonamargy, now the name of an obscure friary probably not founded until at least a century after the first occurrence of 'Moneth' or its variants; by its position it was in the vicinity of Fair Head. Apart from the question of identification, there are issues of occurrence and absence. The most obvious absences are of Carrickfergus (seven mentions) and Sligo (three mentions); we might expect them to be the commonest names on the portolans.

The answer may lie in what these portolans are: lists of prominent features along the coast. Likewise, the main bays, Donegal Bay, Sheep Haven Bay, Lough Swilly and Lough Foyle, are all unmentioned; the islands and headlands between which the loughs lay were more important. The surprise mention is that of Dunseverick, neither a good port nor a prominent place during the late Middle Ages; possibly this is the name given to the Causeway headlands. As Westropp pointed out, these are not academic maps, drawn to record an abstract view of the world. They record practical information, to be used as guides for navigation and trade over the fourteenth, fifteenth and (earlier part of) sixteenth centuries.³⁹ Neither the spellings nor the pattern of occurrences of the places named show any strong indication of being a single list copied and repeated over the centuries. They do, however, represent a body of knowledge, rather greater than just a list of the main headlands in order along the coast. The copies which we now have were not taken to sea, because then they would have been lost or perished. They may have been the way that guilds of seamen stored accumulated knowledge for the use of their successors. Taken together, they appear

³⁸ T. J. Westropp, 'Early Italian maps of Ireland, from 1300 to 1600', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 30C (1913), 361–428: 408ff.

³⁹ Westropp, 'Early Italian maps of Ireland', 362.

to be a strong indication that, from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, men from across Europe were able to list the main features of the northern and western coastlines of Ireland. This must imply that they, or men that they knew, had been along this coast for the purposes of trade. This observation is reinforced by the increasing documentary evidence derived from English government sources, as the Tudor pressure on Ireland increased after the middle of the sixteenth century.

From the middle of the sixteenth century land maps of much greater accuracy began to become available. The motive for making these maps was not, like the portolans, to guide shipmen on commercial voyages around the island, but political, to assist the English government's attempts to control the island of Ireland. As such, the purpose of such maps was to facilitate armies, military not maritime or commercial; the sea was simply the edge of the cartographers' maps.⁴⁰ J. H. Andrews distinguishes between the traditions of map-making—where the aim is a full representation of the world or part of it—and the diagrammatic representation of a list of features, often along a route; he compares the latter with the famous London Underground 'map'.⁴¹ Andrews discusses two mid-sixteenth-century maps which illustrate the two traditions well. His first is based on sea-based information (like the portolans), listing coastal features, and has a complex, fantastical coastline of bays and headlands.⁴² The second shows Ireland with a smooth coastline but a much busier interior.⁴³ What Andrews would term a true map, aiming at a representation of the shape of the island and concentrating on inland features more than coastal ones, although using maritime knowledge, had emerged by the middle of the sixteenth century; it is exemplified by one published by Mercator in 1564.

Linked to Mercator's is a map copied in around 1560 by Laurence Nowell, the antiquarian and associate of William Cecil. It seems very unlikely that he compiled it even though he visited Ireland in June and July 1560.⁴⁴ His experience of practical surveying was limited and two months would not have sufficed to allow him to cover the whole of the island. The map of Ireland appears in two copies in Nowell's notebook—a minute version with names so small that they are hard to read and a larger version dividing Ireland into two parts, north and south (Fig. 1).⁴⁵ These maps formed the basis for his 'General Description' of c. 1564, a map which shows the whole of Britain and Ireland.⁴⁶ Peter Barber has suggested that Nowell's maps in his notebook are closely related to Sebastiano de Rê's printed map of Ireland of 1558, though this seems unlikely to be the original source since many of the place names on Nowell's notebook map are in English.⁴⁷ These include 'Mountayn foote' which must have been near Newcastle (Co. Down) where the Mourne Mountains drop down sharply to the coast and 'White head' which is a translation of the Irish Kinbane. There can be no doubt that his map was based upon a chart compiled by mariners since it shows close attention to headlands, banks, rocks and a comparatively detailed record of the coast. By contrast, the interior of the country is vague and lacking in much information. It is notable that there is comparatively less detail of the coastal form and fewer place names from Sligo northwards and

⁴⁰ Peter Barber, 'A Tudor mystery, Laurence Nowell's map of England', *The Map Collector* 22 (1983), 16–21; Jane E. A. Dawson, 'William Cecil and the British dimension of early Elizabethan foreign policy', *History* 74:241 (1989), 196–216.

⁴¹ J. H. Andrews, *Shapes of Ireland: maps and their makers 1564–1839* (Dublin, 1997), 31–3.

⁴² Andrews, *Shapes of Ireland*, [Add page no.], fig. 2.5; TNA, MPF 1/72, [Detail of archival material], 1558[, Add folio number].

⁴³ Andrews, *Shapes of Ireland*, [Add page no.], fig. 2.6; by Bertelli in Venice, c. 1560.

⁴⁴ Rebecca Brackmann, *The Elizabethan invention of the Anglo-Saxon England: Laurence Nowell, William Lambarde and the study of Old English* (Woodbridge, Suff., 2012), 164 suggests that Nowell was the source of the maps, though this seems altogether unlikely for the reasons indicated here and because most of the other material on Ireland in the book was from other sources, as she demonstrates. Peter Barber, 'England II: monarchs, ministers, and maps, 1550–1625', in David Buisseret (ed.), *Monarchs, ministers and maps: the emergence of cartography as a tool of government in early modern Europe* (Chicago and London, 1992), 57–98: 63–4.

⁴⁵ BL, Cotton MS. Domitian A xviii, Laurence Nowell's notebook, c. 1560, ff. 97, 100v.–101, 102v.–103.

⁴⁶ BL, Add. MS. 62,540, [Detail of archival material], [Add date].

⁴⁷ Barber, 'A Tudor mystery', 18.

Lough Foyle westwards, although there is sufficient to show that this area had been visited and the major topographical features noted. If we contrast this with the extraordinary detail given for the south-east of Ireland, we might speculate that the prototype of the map may have originated in Bristol where such knowledge is likely to have been current.

As tension increased in Ireland during the later sixteenth century, the demand for land maps grew; it was boosted by the success of Robert Lythe, the first cartographer to spend a long time in the country and to carry out a serious programme of land survey. The information was limited to where English agents could move and record, which excluded the Gaelic north-west: 'it was in the Irishry of northern and north-western Ireland that cartography lagged furthest behind contemporary written sources'.⁴⁸ The maps from Mercator in 1564 to Giovanni Battista Boazio in 1599 and John Speed in 1610 show increasing knowledge and accuracy of the land spreading north from Belfast Lough to the Bann and then along to Donegal. We may derive something from their efforts, however. They locate some of the names in the portolans or other sources: Cape Teelin is the Slieve League Peninsula; Mulroy Bay was called Red Bay. Donegal, Killybegs and Teelin are always placed in the correct order and relationship to each other along the north side of Donegal Bay. One comment, added by Jodocus Hondius to his map of 1591, that 'from Dore (Derry) Castel to the sea 10 miles all very deep water', must derive from a sailor who knew the Foyle Estuary or from memories of Randolph's expedition in 1566, when he established a short-lived garrison at Derry, supplied by sea.⁴⁹ The coastal information appears to come from a list of names rather than from any actual observation. The estuaries of Lough Foyle, Lough Swilly, Mulroy Bay and Sheep Haven Bay are likewise always shown in the correct order but Mulroy Bay and Sheep Haven Bay are represented simply as river mouths, not sea loughs as Lough Foyle and Lough Swilly are.

During the sixteenth century two new sources of information revealed the state of outside knowledge of our area: lists of havens and general surveys. The first of the lists is the fullest: a memorandum sent to Henry VIII by St Leger in 1543.⁵⁰ In it, he describes the situation of Irish ports and trade at the time of writing, appending a list of havens in the country. For the coast between Sligo and Carrickfergus, he lists eleven havens: Assaroe (the mouth of the Erne), Donegal, Killybegs, Aran, Sheep Haven, 'Northerborne' (presumably Mulroy Bay), Lough Swilly, Lough Foyle, the Bann and Olderfleet (at the entrance to Larne Lough). He omits Portrush, found commonly on portolans, but it is a small harbour and he concentrates on large anchorages, dismissing all the east coast harbours south of Carlingford as bad. He is also very concerned by the numbers of Breton and Spanish boats going to the south-west and supplying the Irish with guns and powder; he emphasised that many of the havens were in O'Donnell hands, the Gaelic Lords of Tyrconnell, and trading with Brittany and Scotland. A second list of 72 havens was copied by Nowell into his notebook. This began at Lough Foyle and continued around the Irish coast as far as Sligo. Stanyhurst (printed in Raphael Holinshed, 1577 and 1587) reproduced the same list with minor additions and it was copied into two volumes which were partially compiled by Robert Beale, clerk to the Privy Council, to aid the English administration of Ireland.⁵¹ Meredith Hanmer had two copies of the Foyle to Sligo list among his papers and one other list (undated, 1591×1604, referred to here as Hanmer C) perhaps derived from it but with supplementary information, while an anonymous author (1598) drew from the same source adding some minor detail.⁵²

The second, the Foyle–Sligo list of ports circulated widely and it is unlikely that it was a recent composition when Nowell recorded it in his notebook c. 1560. Copyists' errors had crept into his version of the text as clerks struggled with unfamiliar names. The haven of 'Bierweis our' on the west coast was followed in the list by 'Bourwis hare', which was almost certainly the same

⁴⁸ Andrews, *Shapes of Ireland*, 50.

⁴⁹ Andrews, *Shapes of Ireland*, 72.

⁵⁰ Record Commission, *State papers during the reign of Henry the Eighth*, vol. 3, 446–8.

⁵¹ BL, Cotton MS. Domitian A xviii, Laurence Nowell's notebook, c. 1560, f. 99v.; Raphael Holinshed, *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, 1st and 2nd editions (1577, 1587) consulted from <http://www.english.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/> (last accessed 20 February 2014); BL, Add. MS. 48,015, [Detail of archival material], [Add date], f. 217; BL, Add. MS. 48,017, [Detail of archival material], [Add date], f. 75v.

⁵² TNA, SP63/214, [Detail of archival material], [Add date] —list A is f. 36, list B is ff. 37–43, list C is ff. 45–45v.; Edmund Hogan (ed.), *The description of Ireland: and the state thereof as it is at this present in anno 1598* (Dublin, 1878), 238–9.

place and these were perhaps identical with 'Bureis nowe' a few lines further on. All these can probably be identified with Burrishoole (near Newport, Co. Mayo). The list was a practical document and, like the portolans, was intended for merchant ships both seeking anchorages and places for trade along the Irish coast. It reflects a developed mercantile knowledge of the geography of Ireland.

We can tabulate the significant lists along with St Leger's, recording the names clockwise from Sligo to Carrickfergus (Table 1). Of these the only uncertainty of identification occurs in Hanmer's third list: whether his 'McSwynyne his harbour' means Sheep Haven Bay or Mulroy Bay is unclear, while he also adds two names further along the north-west coast which are now illegible. What is immediately striking is how St Leger is able to list more havens along the north-west coast than any of the others, and this is in spite of his providing a shorter list for the whole island. The lists, apart perhaps from Hanmer's third, do not even match the maps, where Donegal and Killybegs are noted on the west coast and the estuaries of Swilly, Mulroy and Sheep Haven on the north. The reasons for the differences presumably lie in the increasing antagonism between the English government and the Irish of the north-west. The lists, and the descriptions that they accompany, are closely linked to government sources, as are the maps. As conflict increased, English cartographers and agents would have been less able to enter the region, let alone note topographical detail. At the same time, English merchants would have also been inhibited from venturing, and they would not have wanted the government to know that they did; as St Leger noted, two of the commodities they might have brought to trade were powder and guns. The lack of information in the lists of havens is, like the deficiencies in the maps, purely that, a deficiency of knowledge in those who compiled them. It is not evidence of a lack of trade, at least in the years before 1550; indeed there may have been a falling off of English trade but more trade with others, as the Irish demand for munitions grew.

From the first decade of the seventeenth century, during the final stages of the Nine Years' War, its end and the aftermath of the Flight of the Earls, when the English had free access to the region, come two documents which throw more light on the region. The first, dating to 1601 and probably emanating from Sir Henry Docwra's force established at Derry, purports to be a list of the main places of the O'Doherty and MacSweeney Doe lordships.⁵³ In fact, it gives a list of the castles and chief houses of most of the present Co. Donegal. As such, it would appear little use to a study of seaborne trade, but it gives some comments on the castles. These show three different interactions between a castle and the sea. At the castle of Donegal 'is a good haven and the river Eske falls into it'. The next entry is: 'over against Donagall, two myles on the other side of the water, stands O'Boyle, where the ships used to ryde'. Later on, we have: 'The next haven to this is Red Haven (the present Mulroy Bay), which parts McSwyn O'Doe's country and McSwyn O'Fane's. By the side of this house is the castle of Menryce, a castle of McSwyn O'Fanet's. Small boates maie come from the Red haven to the castle'. A further entry notes the presence of the 'castle called McSwyn O'Bane's Tower' but, although it is sited beside the sea, the document makes no mention of this.⁵⁴ The first case, Donegal, concerns seagoing vessels and O'Boyle's Castle lies at the end of the deep-water channel nearest to Donegal. In the second case, seagoing vessels may enter Mulroy Bay but, as the survey notes, only smaller boats may reach the castle (now called Moross Castle), while the third, McSwyne's Castle, has no proper access by boat although it is sited beside the sea. The document is discriminating and precise: not all sites are the same, which invites inspection on the ground to test the author's comments.

The second document is a wide-ranging survey conducted by inquests over the summer of 1608, to record the lands and assets escheating to the Crown as a result of the Flight of the Earls the year before.⁵⁵ It lists the assets by barony over six of the then counties of Ireland, Tyrone, Coleraine, Donegal, Fermanagh, Cavan and Armagh, under three headings: royal land, other royal economic assets and church land. It is the second of these that interests us here; the information is summarised in Table 2. The most striking observations are the prevalence of salmon fishing

⁵³ Herbert F. Hore, 'Lough Foyle in 1601', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology First Series* 5 (1857), 139–43.

⁵⁴ Hore, 'Lough Foyle in 1601', 143.

⁵⁵ 'MS. Rawlinson A. 237., Bodleian Library, Oxford', *Analecta Hibernica* 3 (1931), 151–218.

stations (the ones not marked with an asterisk are described as ‘small’) and the record of markets. They concentrate on the north coast from the Bann (Antrim is excluded) to Bloody Foreland with a certain presence in Donegal Bay. The extent of the exploitation and its organisation is impressive. Equally significant economically as the fisheries are the weekly markets listed; these are one of the essential components of the commercial system of medieval Europe and we find five recorded here: four in Co. Donegal and one in Cavan. The Co. Donegal markets are situated beside fisheries and sheltered, deep-water harbours. For some reason, the survey lists a number of annual fairs only in Co. Cavan.

Fieldwork

The life of Hugh Roe O’Donnell provides the clearest account from this period of the operation of a port in the north-west of Ireland. It describes the kidnap in 1587 of O’Donnell by a ship which arrived in Rathmullan under the pretence of a merchant vessel trading from Dublin.⁵⁶ The ship anchored in the deep water opposite the tower house at Rathmullan and the crew began trading on the shore. O’Donnell was lured to the ship to obtain more wine and taken out to it on a small boat. Once on board, he was held captive. The ship was slow to get under way because it had to weigh its anchor and wait for the tide. This provides a template for the sites of trade, and formed the basis for fieldwork undertaken in late 2013. From the pattern of commerce in the North Atlantic, we expected to find places with a sheltered deep-water anchorage, which was both connected to the open sea and close to shore. The shoreline would have a firm, gently shelving beach, either naturally or artificially cleared of protruding rocks, on which the small boats could settle as the tide dropped. The beach should be easily accessible by carts from the land and not, for example, be sited at the base of a cliff. Study of the waters was informed by contemporary yachting guides, though these have to be used critically. Modern yachts have quite deep keels and may well draw more water than a medieval vessel. Moreover, yachting guides are particularly cautious, since they provide a guide for leisure boating not for a journey driven by commercial imperative. Guides are also influenced in their identification of anchorages by the presence of modern facilities, such as shops and fuel, issues which did not determine the course of action of the merchants with which we are concerned. Finally, modern conditions may not be the same as those in the late sixteenth century. Bays may have silted up or have been scoured by the tide in the last 400 years. Moreover, some sailors may have preferred harbours with awkward approaches which made access more difficult for the inexperienced and potentially hostile.

The fieldwork carried out was guided by two factors. It was based on the lists of havens and landing places and on the requirements the maritime trade made: sheltered, deep-water anchorages close to shore. It was focused on these requirements and was not intended as a general survey of the entire coastline or intertidal zone. The aim was to test whether the lists of havens corresponded to the topographical needs identified as serving the trading system. Our starting point was the description, already mentioned, made in 1601, which cast a discriminating eye over the main places in the O’Doherty and MacSweeney Doe lordships.⁵⁷ The first site examined was Moross Castle described in the 1601 survey as a castle of McSwyne Fanad. This was said by the survey to be accessible only by small boats. The castle or tower house sits on a rock outcrop which formed a tidal island, but is now connected to the mainland by an artificial causeway. In the past, the tower house would have been reached over the gravel at low tide. Two hundred metres or so north of the tower house is an abandoned jetty for a former ferry which was still working in the nineteenth century. The ferry landing place, the bay to the east of the tower house and the southern end of the island, where there is currently a small pier; all would have provided suitable places to land a small boat, with a draft of under a metre. This arm of Mulroy Bay is narrow and, as the 1601 survey implies, would have been unsuitable for larger sailing vessels. The distance from the ship anchorage must have meant that Moross Castle can never have been a significant centre of commerce, but may have been a minor place of trade.

⁵⁶ Paul Walsh (ed.), *Beatha Aodha Ruaidh Uí Dhomhnaill, The Life of Aodh Ruadh Ó Domhnaill*, Irish Texts Society 42 (Dublin, 1948) 1, 6–11.

⁵⁷ Hore, ‘Lough Foyle in 1601’, 139–43.

Sheep Haven, according to the Irish Cruising Club, is ‘easily accessible in daylight and provides safe anchorage in all summer weather’.⁵⁸ At its head is Ards Bay, with a channel leading up to Castle Doe. The castle is situated at a point where the channel narrows and swings close into the shore, so that the site can dominate access up river. Ards Bay itself ‘probably provides the best shelter in Sheep Haven’: there is a bar at the entrance which makes it awkward for modern yachts in a heavy sea, but it is at least 2.4m deep, and does not pose a problem for ships with shallower keels.⁵⁹ The channel up to Doe needs care but is scoured by two rivers. The 1601 survey notes that ‘next to that is the haven Conogarhen with a castle so called’, noting in the margin that it was McSwyne Doe’s chief house. The bay immediately to the north-west of the castle is probably too shallow for small boats. An altogether more likely place is just to the south-west of the castle entrance. There is an artificial line of large stones forming a jetty on the foreshore to the north-east side of the cove and a cleared area adjoining it (Pl. I). The water here gets deeper more rapidly and it is only a short distance to the deep-water channel in which ships could be anchored. Moreover, the landing place is close to the castle so that goods landed there could be easily brought up.

Donegal town is situated beyond the head of the bay on the River Eske. It was said in 1566 to be accessible by boats of ten tons, but larger ships found it difficult to approach.⁶⁰ A ship from Derry in 1601 managed to ascend as far the friary, but in the nineteenth century ships anchored further out near Green Island, a place marked on the first-edition six-inch map as ‘Ship Ride’.⁶¹ In the early seventeenth century, according to the survey, ships anchored at O’Boyle’s house, Ballyboyle Castle. The tower house itself is situated at a point where the channel is constricted by the island opposite. It stands above a steep, though low cliff, so that it is not immediately approachable from the river, but there are suitable hard at the edge of the channel both upstream and downstream of the cliff.⁶² The upstream hard is accessible now by a ramp from the road onto the foreshore, allowing boats to be launched. The area downstream is separated from the road by a wall and small drop onto the foreshore. Both have fine gravel over mud making a firm, but suitable landing place for boats. Smaller boats would have proceeded further up the Eske to Donegal to trade there.

Places where there has been considerable modern development were excluded from the field study since the conditions of the waterfronts are likely to have been changed out of recognition since the sixteenth century. On that basis, Moville in Lough Foyle described as ‘a haven’, Rathmullan itself, Assaroe, Killybegs and Teelin were eliminated from the fieldwork, but not of course from any evaluation of the pattern. The sites with the topography expected at trading sites may be contrasted with McSwyne’s Castle on McSwyne’s Bay a few miles from Donegal. This too is mentioned in the 1601 survey, but not identified as a haven. There is a small bay called Castle Port to the east of the promontory on which the tower house stands. At the head of this bay is a steep storm beach with large stones. The nature of such a beach implies that it is exposed to the winds and the lack of a well-protected suitable anchorage for ships offshore makes this quite an unlikely place for trade. In spite of the name, it is evident that Castle Port did not serve as such in the sixteenth century. Not every coastal tower house was suitably located for trade.

In addition to those sites mentioned in the 1601 survey, the site of Castle Conor on the River Moy was also examined. In 1400 the crayer *Le Trinité* was given a licence to sail to the ‘castle of Conore’ and the town of Sligo.⁶³ However, by 1612 the estuary, described as the harbour of Moyne from the townland at its mouth was said to be such that ‘no good ship can enter further

⁵⁸ Irish Cruising Club, *Sailing directions for the east and north coasts of Ireland* (Antrim, 2002 edition), 145–6.

⁵⁹ Irish Cruising Club, *Sailing directions for the east and north coasts of Ireland*, 147.

⁶⁰ Denis Murphy (ed.), *Beatha Aodha Ruaidh Uí Dhomhnaill, The Life of Hugh Roe O’Donnell* (Dublin, 1893), 34, n.3.

⁶¹ Walsh, *Beatha Aodha Ruaidh Uí Dhomhnaill* 1, 304–07.

⁶² ‘O’Boyle’s old castle’ was said to have been beside the sea. The current remains are those of the house constructed there out of its remains: Russell and Prendergast, *Calendar of state papers relating to Ireland, of the reign of James I*, vol. 4, 123.

⁶³ Deputy Keeper of the Records, *Calendar of patent rolls*, vol. 1, 248, 260, 425.

than the bay where on the west a good store of shipping may ride'.⁶⁴ This may have been the case two centuries earlier when ships may have had to anchor out in the bay and only boats ventured up to Castle Conor. The distance from the bay to Castle Conor seems to have prevented the subsequent development of any significant port and none is recorded here in the sixteenth century.

We should not expect to find remains of landing places on the foreshore at any of these sites, since it is doubtful that there was any significant infrastructure. The greatest work may have been to move larger stones where necessary to provide a place at which boats could be drawn up. Castle Doe provides an example of such activity. However, the study of the natural situation of the sites confirmed our understanding of the operation of waterborne trade in both a positive and negative sense. It is evident that ships required a sheltered anchorage and reasonably deep water. All the sites at which havens were recorded offered these conditions. Equally, McSwyne's Castle, where no haven was recorded, was entirely unsuitable as a long-term anchorage for trade. The beach is formed of stones rather than shingle and the approach is rock-strewn. There has been a lot of erosion in the past, testimony to the site's exposure to strong winds from the south-west. Moross Castle, which is well up the inlet, was said to be accessible only by small boats, exactly as it is, far from any deep-water anchorage. Castle Conor seems to have been similar and apparently had disappeared as a trading site in the sixteenth century. Fieldwork established that the conditions which trading places required under the North Atlantic system did, indeed, exist along the coast of Gaelic Ulster and did so at the places listed as havens in contemporary records.

Gaelic trade and towns

The continental European system of commerce was well established in Anglo-Norman Ulster through Carrickfergus and other towns. Fishing appears steadily in the records as a source of income from the middle of the thirteenth century onwards. These are principally the fisheries (presumably salmon) of the Bann and the Bush, and the prise of fish from Portrush, all on the north coast, and a herring fishery on the south-east. More general references to trade mention ships from Carrickfergus and Coleraine, trading with France, Spain and Bristol, while licences were issued to Carrickfergus and Portrush men in the fourteenth century to trade with Scotland, both the lowlands and the Western Isles. A group of ports are accounted together for customs duty as the 'ports of Ulster': Coleraine, Carrickfergus, Strangford, Carlingford and Dundalk (Fig. 2). We should also note the evidence for the inland town of Antrim, with burgesses, tolls and a prise of brewers in the 1350s.⁶⁵ The evidence reflects the sources, with their concentration on English-claimed lands, borough towns, ports and customs dues, along with occasional references to individual events giving glimpses of the resources traded and the destinations of Ulster boats and goods. Commerce did not end with the political collapse of the earldom after 1333, or with the economic downturn of the later fourteenth century. Carlingford and Carrickfergus definitely survived through to the post-medieval period; in both, the merchant families were prosperous enough to erect tower houses: eight or ten are shown on a map of Carrickfergus of the 1560s.⁶⁶ To do this, they must have maintained the trading connections between the Irish Sea network and their hinterlands. An interesting glimpse of the operation of trade is given in Sir Henry Sidney's memoirs. He describes a twice-weekly market in Carrickfergus which sold produce from the surrounding area and traded with Scotland, the Isle of Man and France. Ships from the latter sold hogsheads of wine at the rate of one for nineteen hides.⁶⁷ These hinterlands fell out of the political control of the English government, although the towns did not. Economically, they survived by continuing trade across

⁶⁴ Sir Henry Ellis, 'A description of the Province of Connaught, dated in the month of "January 1612" from a volume of the Lansdowne Manuscripts preserved in the British Museum. no. 255', *Archaeologia* 27 (1838), 131.

⁶⁵ T. E. McNeill, *Anglo-Norman Ulster* (Edinburgh, 1980), 41, 57–8, 91–4, 132–44.

⁶⁶ BL, Cotton MS. Augustus I ii, [Detail of archival material], [Add date], 42; reproduced in T. E. McNeill, *Carrickfergus Castle* (Belfast, 1981), frontispiece.

⁶⁷ Henry Sidney, 'Sir Henry Sidney's memoir of his government of Ireland', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology First Series* 3 (1855), 33–52, 85–109, 336–57: 96.

what was a line based purely on supposed political allegiance. In fact, the Gaelic lordships continued to trade through the towns.

The trade actually may have expanded after 1350; certainly towns did. Possibly the earliest new venture is the foundation and expansion of the town of Ardglass, linked to the new boom trade of herring fishing in the Irish Sea. A major building—the Newark—was constructed here by Janico Dartas in the early fifteenth century with shops for merchants and a common dining room and kitchen for sailors. A stone warehouse was constructed next to the tower house known as Jordan's Castle, named after Thomas Jordan, a Drogheda merchant who had taken the farm of the manors of Ardglass and Strangford in the early sixteenth century. Ardglass illustrates the complexity of late medieval identity, economy and politics. Its political allegiance was to the English Crown, and Dartas, a squire from the Pyrenees but in the service of the king of England, saw it as a suitable place for investment.⁶⁸ Its immediate hinterland was Lecale, an area of small lordships of Anglo-Norman ancestry but with a tenuous connection to the fifteenth-century Dublin government. Beyond Lecale, the Irish lordships of Dufferin and Iveagh were about fifteen miles away, well within the trading hinterland of Ardglass. Around Strangford Lough, it has been noted that there is a shift in the centres of lesser estates, from mottes sited inland on good corn-growing land to tower houses on the coast, a pattern likely to be related to the growth in trade of fifteenth-century Ardglass.⁶⁹

From this point, the early fifteenth century, the sources for commerce dry up for the more English areas of eastern Ulster: they had never existed for the Gaelic centre and west. One process that we can see is that Irish lordships absorbed, or indeed stimulated, urban trade on the continental European pattern. They move from exploiting an 'English' merchant town (Galway, Sligo or Carrickfergus) adjacent to their lordship, to having a town at their centre. Newry always lay beyond the English lordships and was controlled from the twelfth century by its Cistercian abbey and the local lords, the Maginesses. The abbey was converted into a college to avoid Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries, but had to surrender to the Crown in 1549 and this led to a survey of its lands.⁷⁰ The survey notes that there were 72 messuages at Newry, along with a mill and two salmon weirs on the Clanrye River and that there was a market. The possessions of the college were granted to Sir Nicholas Bagnell and the reality of a functioning town, implied in the 1549 survey, is shown in a rental of 1575, including the town.⁷¹ The rented property is listed in three areas: along the High Street, within the fort and along Irish Street outside the fort; this corresponds well to the 72 messuages of the 1549 survey. Probably in 1568, between the two surveys, Robert Lythe made a map of the town which puts the survey and rental information into a topographical context.⁷² The map also notes that at the point where the town touches the river, 'into this place maye come a barke or a goye off tenne or twelfe tonnes at a spring tide'. Until it was submerged under the modern Abbey Way, the sixteenth-century plan was still visible in the modern street plan. Crucially, by 1549, before Bagnell was granted it, we can see that Newry was a fairly small but flourishing town in the Gaelic lordship of the Maginesses.

⁶⁸ Mark Gardiner, 'The late medieval port buildings of Ardglass (Co. Down) in their European context, and their implications for trade', in T. Reeves-Smith and P. Logue (eds), *Beyond the horizon of memory* (forthcoming); T. E. McNeill, 'Three medieval buildings in the port of Ardglass, Co. Down', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 105C (2005), 1–21; BL, Harleian MS. 37,556, [Detail of archival material], [Add date], f. 23v.; D. B. Quinn, 'Anglo-Irish Ulster in the early sixteenth century', *Proceedings of the Belfast Natural History and Philosophical Society* [vol. no.] (1933–4), 56–78: 76–7 quoting TNA, SC11/934, [Detail of archival material], [Add date].

⁶⁹ T. E. McNeill, 'Mountains or molehills? Different uses for mottes in the lordships of eastern Ireland', *Archaeological Journal* 168 (2011), 227–71: 260.

⁷⁰ Mervyn Archdall, *Monasticon Hibernicum: or, an history of the abbeys, priories, and other religious houses in Ireland* (Dublin, 1786), 790–1.

⁷¹ Harold O'Sullivan, 'A 1575 rent-roll, with contemporaneous maps, of the Bagenal estate in the Carlingford Lough district', *Journal of the County Louth Archaeological and Historical Society* 21 (1985), 31–47: 34–6.

⁷² O'Sullivan, 'A 1575 rent-roll, of the Bagenal estate', 46; J. H. Andrews, 'The Irish surveys of Robert Lythe', *Imago Mundi* 19 (1965), 22–31: 31.

The case of Cavan town was highlighted by Nicholls who has described it as ‘the only example of what could be called town development in a Gaelic lordship’.⁷³ The evidence has been assembled by Jonathan Cherry in his introduction to Cavan as a Plantation town.⁷⁴ In 1479 merchants of towns in Co. Meath complained of competition from Irish markets, naming Cavan as the first of these and other references to it as a town occur in the sixteenth century. The lord, Myles O’Reilly, in 1558 granted Bernard O’Brady a vacant part of the town as payment for paving one of the streets in the town, building houses along it and constructing a watermill. A map of the town of the later sixteenth century shows it with four streets meeting at right angles at a wider central space where there is a market cross. The O’Reillys had built a castle at the town and founded a friary there in the early fourteenth century. Both Cavan and Newry have been regarded in a similar light to Sligo and Carrickfergus, towns founded in English lordships but surviving under Gaelic lords after the retraction of English lordship. They are often described as English ‘islands’ in a Gaelic world, seen as extensions of an essentially English commercial network over the borders of the lordship of Meath and Louth, exceptions which prove the rule that there were no Gaelic towns. This is to ignore two things. Firstly, whoever the traders were, they were trading with the town’s hinterland, so the people of the Irish lordship around them were fully involved in the trade. Secondly, we can see from the Newry rental that many of the better-off merchants of High Street had Irish names. This was a mixed community, engaged in a common economic enterprise.

The west coast essentially reflects the east coast situation, with Co. Kerry and Co. Limerick featuring in the Customs receipts of 1276–1332. Galway was established as a centre of the Anglo–Norman lordship of Connacht, while Sligo appears at its northern limit. Both acted as important centres for commerce, not only of foreign merchants, but for an extensive hinterland. John Blake, a Galway merchant was invited, in the mid-fifteenth century, to bring wine to trade in Roscommon in the O’Conor Don lordship. There was, his correspondent informed him, a supply of linen waiting for him there which had been gathered to redeem the debt that was owed to Blake.⁷⁵ Again they survived after the mid-fourteenth century as nominally English in politics, while continuing to trade with an essentially Irish hinterland. The main difference between west and east coasts is that the former was more likely to see Breton or Spanish merchants than the latter, and less likely to see English ones.

We have seen trading, especially in fish, extended before the end of the sixteenth century along the northern and western coasts of Ulster. The trade appears to be based on the North Atlantic model, outlined above. Although this has that system as its base, there is evidence for towns developing on top of it. This is a difficult topic, for the term ‘town’ may be loosely used for any settlement in contemporary documents, while in modern times, different definitions are to be found. Because we are interested here in commerce and commercialisation, we have taken the prime point to be evidence of a market; evidence of a significant nucleation of houses is secondary. The town of Donegal was the site of O’Donnell’s largest castle, while about four miles up-river in Lough Eske was his crannog which he could use as a bolthole and storehouse. Hugh Roe (I) O’Donnell is said to have founded a castle at Donegal town and a friary which served as the family burial place in 1473 or 1474.⁷⁶ Donegal town is listed in the survey of 1608 as having a weekly market; presumably near the castle, but trade was already well established in the mid-sixteenth century.⁷⁷ It was described in 1566 as a ‘town with all ruined which heretofore hath been great and inhabited with men of traffic especially with English men’.⁷⁸ As noted above, the lord of Donegal,

⁷³ Nicholls, *Gaelic and gaelicised Ireland*, 122.

⁷⁴ Jonathan Cherry, ‘Colonial appropriation of Gaelic urban space: creating the first Ulster Plantation town’, *Irish Geography* 40 (2007), 112–27.

⁷⁵ Nicholls, ‘Gaelic society and economy’, 419.

⁷⁶ John O’Donovan (ed.), *Annals—the kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters*, 2nd edition (7 vols, 1856), *sub anno* 1505; Aubrey Gwynn and R. Neville Hadcock, *Medieval religious houses; Ireland* (London, 1970), 246.

⁷⁷ ‘MS. Rawlinson A. 237’, 184.

⁷⁸ Darren McGettigan, ‘A house divided: the political community of the lordship of Tír Chonaill and reaction to the Nine Years War’, in Robert Armstrong and Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin (eds), *Community in early modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2006), 91–102: 91, citing TNA, SP63/19/86–91, [Detail of archival material], [Add date].

O'Donnell, maintained Ballyboyle Castle (first mentioned in 1440) through his vassal, O'Boyle, some two miles downstream from the castle at the point where the deep-water channel from Donegal Bay ran out.⁷⁹ There was a landing place here beside the pool described in 1601 as 'where the ships used to ride'.⁸⁰ All the elements of a town are here, if rather spread out.

The O'Donnells had three other centres which may have been urban. Killybegs, to the west of Donegal town, was the site of the castle of McSwyne Banagh, which had replaced an earlier house of the bishop of Raphoe and a port regularly used by French fishing vessels, Spanish merchants and envoys.⁸¹ At the mouth of the River Erne, at the southernmost point of their lands, lies Ballyshannon, which was the site of a castle erected in 1423 and a market in 1608.⁸² Trade seems to have started even earlier here, because the *Annals of Ulster* mention the presence of foreign ships at *Port na Long* in 1420.⁸³ It lies about a mile from the Cistercian abbey of Assaroe which might explain why there was no friary there.⁸⁴ The present town has overwhelmed the area, but there must have been a haven in the mouth of the river, and it is recorded as a salmon fishery in 1608.⁸⁵ At the other end of their lordship was Lifford. There is no record of a market there but it was a nucleated settlement of some size. According to information reaching the English government, it was a regular meeting place for O'Donnell and the earl of Tyrone, and French and Spanish ships and envoys; in 1600, it is stated that seagoing ships, with a pilot, could sail up the Foyle to it.⁸⁶ It was described in the *Annals of the four masters* as 'the celebrated residence of O'Donnell' and a town enclosed only by a shallow ditch and small rampart.⁸⁷ Months after its capture in October 1600 by Niall Garve O'Donnell—who was allied to the English general, Sir Henry Docwra, based at Derry—Lifford is described as having 'some eighty houses set in a plain green upon the river side and [confirming the *Annals*' account] encompassed by an old ditch with three small bulwarks'.⁸⁸ We have another record of Lifford, following its capture, by General Docwra. According to Docwra, during its capture, the 'fort' was burned but 'the rest of the howses scattered abroad in the towne (which were about twenty) were preserved'.⁸⁹ Whether we can accept these accounts as evidence of an urban settlement is problematic but possible.

Rathmullan Castle was said to be 'Mac Swyn O'Fane's chief house' in 1601: there was also a Carmelite friary there, founded in 1516, or possibly in 1403, by a MacSweeney.⁹⁰ The friary was built close to the shore with the castle adjacent opposite a point where there is now a pier.⁹¹ There was a weekly market here, listed in the Inquest of 1608 into Crown resources.⁹² The key to its situation is Lough Swilly, 'one of the finest big ship harbours in the British Isles, 25 miles long by 3.5 miles wide with a clear entrance accessible in any weather and the best yachting area on the north coast'.⁹³ The deep water channel narrows sharply when it divides at the north end of Inch Island. The eastern arm runs between Inch and the east shore of the lough and becomes tidal just south of Faughan. The main, western, arm runs right up to the western coast at Rathmullan Point so

⁷⁹ Brian Lacy, *Archaeological survey of County Donegal* (Lifford, 1983), 380.

⁸⁰ Hore, 'Lough Foyle in 1601', 143.

⁸¹ Hamilton, Atkinson and Mahaffy, *Calendar of state papers relating to Ireland*, vol. 9, 259; vol. 11, 54; Walsh, *Beatha Aodha Ruaidh Uí Dhomhnaill* 1, 120–1, 140–1, 282–3; Frank Coyne and Tracy Collins, *Excavation of a post-medieval settlement at Rough Point, Killybegs, County Donegal* (Limerick, 2004), 21–2.

⁸² Lacy, *Archaeological survey of County Donegal*, 384.

⁸³ [O'Donovan?], *Annals of Ulster* [*Annals—the kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters?*][If not, you need to give this reference in full as it is its first use.] 3, 84–5.

⁸⁴ Gwynn and Hadcock, *Medieval religious houses; Ireland*, 127.

⁸⁵ 'MS. Rawlinson A. 237', 184.

⁸⁶ Hamilton, Atkinson and Mahaffy, *Calendar of state papers relating to Ireland*, vol. 5, 215, 523, 527.

⁸⁷ O'Donovan, *Annals—the kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters, sub anno 1600*.

⁸⁸ Hamilton, Atkinson and Mahaffy, *Calendar of state papers relating to Ireland*, vol. 10, 93.

⁸⁹ William Kelly (ed.), *Docwra's Derry: a narration of events in north-west Ulster, 1600–1604*, ed. (in 1849) by John O'Donovan (Belfast, 2003), 51.

⁹⁰ Hore, 'Lough Foyle in 1601', 141; Gwynn and Hadcock, *Medieval religious houses; Ireland*, 291.

⁹¹ Lacy, *Archaeological survey of County Donegal*, 343–6, 382.

⁹² 'MS. Rawlinson A. 237', 176.

⁹³ Irish Cruising Club, *Sailing directions for the east and north coasts of Ireland*, 131–2.

that there is a deep water anchorage there, very close to a sandy shore, one of the few in the lough which does not dry out at low tide and ‘well sheltered in prevailing S.W. to N.N.W. winds’.⁹⁴ There was a landing place or harbour either on the strand to the north of the pier or between the rocks to the west, where the Ordnance Survey marks a harbour.

It is possible to propose a reconstruction of the fishing and trading system existing in the lordship of MacSweeney Fanad, which occupied the west side of Lough Swilly. The inquest of 1608 lists fishing stations (see above). Salmon were caught at the mouths of the two main rivers running into the west side of Lough Swilly: the Swilly at Farsetmore and the Leannan at Rathmelton; the Rathmullan salmon fishery may have been exploiting the River Glenalla, three kilometres south-west of it. Rathmullan is also a base for sea-fishing, catching ‘herring and other fish’, although it is well down the lough from the open sea. This offered two opportunities: it could provide easy access to the open-water fishing grounds along the north coast and it could offer a safe anchorage for ships from abroad. They could load up there with fish caught and processed, by salting, pickling or smoking, at any of the three fisheries and then brought along the coast to them: it was no coincidence that it was from Rathmullan that the earls fled in 1607 in a ship operating under the guise of a fishing vessel.

The north coast was approached from the south along the east and west coasts, as well as having direct links to Scotland. At its eastern end, the MacDonalds of Islay expanded their holdings in Ulster, seizing ‘the Route’, the northern part of Co. Antrim. On these lands lay the port called in English sources ‘Market-town Bay’. The river running into it is the Margy and the friary beside this called Bonamargy (the mouth of the Margy): the name is likely to derive from the Irish *margadh* (‘market’).⁹⁵ These names are first mentioned in 1568, 1574 and 1585–6, before the English controlled the land.⁹⁶ In December 1603, after the MacDonalds were finally confirmed, under Randal MacDonald, later the first earl of Antrim, in their possession of the Route, MacDonald appointed Hugh McNeill constable of the castle at Dunineny, beside Ballycastle, along with lands there and the customs of the port and the market.⁹⁷ The settlement may have been further developed under the MacDonalds into a proper port and town, because they, like Bagnell at Newry took over a pre-existing urban settlement. MacDonald went on to develop a town at his chief house at Dunluce, described by George Carew in 1611 as having ‘many tenements, after the fashion of the Pale, peopled for the most part with Scotsmen’.⁹⁸ Randal’s town is usually seen in terms of the various royal schemes of Plantation in Tudor and Stuart Ireland or the similar Scottish royal scheme for Lewis,⁹⁹ but his father had overseen the development of a new town at Ballycastle, and Carew’s survey is only three years after the Plantation of Ulster—a very short time to have stimulated a town in another lordship. An inquisition of 1630 into the state of fishing in Co. Antrim records that there were salmon fishing stations at the Bann, Portrush, the Bush, Port Braddan, Bonamargy, Cushendun, Cushendall and Glenarm. All, apart from the Bann, were in the hands of Randal MacDonald and all apart from the last three, which had not been used recently, were then worth £70 per annum.¹⁰⁰

As well as these places, where a number of features and sources attest an urban development, there are a number of more problematic sites. The absence of evidence about the

⁹⁴ Irish Cruising Club, *Sailing directions for the east and north coasts of Ireland*, 139.

⁹⁵ Fiachra Mac Gabhann, *Place-names of Northern Ireland*, vol. 7, *County Antrim*. 2, *Ballycastle and North-East Antrim* (Belfast, 1997), 127, 265.

⁹⁶ Bernadette Cunningham (ed.), *Calendar of state papers Ireland 1568–1571* (Dublin, 2010), 32.1, 74.11, 100, 115; Hamilton, Atkinson and Mahaffy, *Calendar of state papers relating to Ireland*, vol. 2, 547–9, 556. ‘Market town’ is also marked on Nowell’s notebook map of c. 1560, BL, Cotton MS. Domitian A xviii, Laurence’s Nowell’s notebook, c. 1560, ff. 102v.–103.

⁹⁷ Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), D/2977/3A/2/1/1A, [Detail of archival material], [Add date]; T. E. McNeill, ‘Excavations at Dunineny Castle, Co. Antrim’, *Medieval Archaeology* 48 (2004), 167–200.

⁹⁸ PRONI, T811/3, [Detail of archival material], [Add date], f. 13, quoted in Hector McDonnell, *A history of Dunluce* (Belfast, 2004), 24.

⁹⁹ McDonnell, *History of Dunluce*; Colin Breen, *Dunluce Castle: history and archaeology* (Dublin, 2012).

¹⁰⁰ George Hill, *An historical account of the MacDonnells of Antrim* (Belfast 1873), 429–30.

state of Coleraine before 1620 may simply be a question of the lack of evidence. It was not a centre in the Tudor wars, featuring in the *Annals* only for infrequent minor fights between the O'Cahans and the MacQuillans. Although its fisheries receive fairly frequent mention, these do not really inform us about the presence of a town or not. There has been little interest in the archaeology of the town, as opposed to the friary, over the last decades, except for a little in the remains of the seventeenth-century Plantation settlement. Lough Foyle presents us with Derry, where there was a Columban monastery, a major abbey in the twelfth century and seat of the bishopric since the thirteenth century. In 1162 the abbot was said to have destroyed 80 houses to construct his new church. After this, references to the place become fewer; the account of Archbishop Colton's visitation in 1397 tells us about the churches of the city and the surrounding settlements where he stayed but little of Derry itself. When Docwra seized it in 1600, he makes no mention of buildings there except for 'the ruines of a old Abbay, of a Bishopp's house, of two Churches, and at one of the ends of it an old castle'; he pulled them down for building materials, leaving only the old round tower. Contemporary maps show only his works with no indication of any settlement on the site of the later town. Upstream lie Strabane and Lifford on either side of the River Foyle. A map of Docwra's campaign labels the first as 'here lyeth the ruines of the old towne of Strabane'.¹⁰¹ So evidently there had been an urban centre until it was destroyed by English forces in 1592; a merchant of Strabane is mentioned in 1596.¹⁰² Armagh is another problem. Bartlett's well-known map reproduced in G. A. Hayes-McCoy's monograph depicts streets and houses but all in complete ruin and abandoned. On the other hand, Bodley's contemporary map shows churches, towers and houses, all standing. A survey of 1618 names six streets in the town with properties along them.¹⁰³ The excavations in Armagh have not, however produced evidence of an urban settlement of the later medieval period, whether by chance or otherwise.

Discussion

The principal aim of this article was to try to move the debate about trade from relating anecdotes to a discussion of commercial systems. It started from trying to imagine what such systems might be and what sort of evidence they might generate, then setting out to seek it. The consistency of the portolan charts in the navigation points and the order in which they list them, even while still having many individual changes, shows that they were maintained as working guides to sailing around Ireland. The only purpose in this can have been trade, from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries. The portolans mark headlands above all, both marks and hazards, but not places to land, which the lists of havens supplied. Checking these lists against topography revealed two things. The first was their reliability; these are indeed the best places to land along the coast. The places which they name also conform to a certain pattern—sheltered stretches of deep water in proximity to flat strands or beaches clear of rocks. These are precisely the sort of places found around the northern coasts of Europe, which were exploited by traders in fish, according to the North Atlantic system. The correlation of the lists of landing places is also shown up by the negative; places such as Moross Castle or Castle McSwyne. These have castles and are on the coast but are not listed as havens and the topography explains why. Moross, in particular, is exactly suitable for what the haven lists describe it as; a place for small boats only.

On the southern and eastern borders and coast of Ulster were towns (Carrickfergus, Sligo and Galway) inherited from the English lordships of the thirteenth century; they did not fail after the political collapse of these lordships but continued to trade, except now with the Gaelic lordships who were their neighbours. Their number was expanded, initially by the growth of Ardglass with its port facilities and proximity to a herring fishery offshore. More importantly, documents, maps and topography combine to demonstrate that Newry and Cavan were both viable and even prosperous trading towns in the earlier sixteenth century, and possibly before. It is

¹⁰¹ G. A. Hayes-McCoy, *Ulster and other Irish maps c. 1600* (Dublin, 1964), pl. 16.

¹⁰² Murphy, *Beatha Aodha Ruaidh Uí Dhomhnaill*, 48–51; Hamilton, Atkinson and Mahaffy, *Calendar of state papers relating to Ireland*, vol. 5, 522.

¹⁰³ Gilbert Camblin, *The town in Ulster: an account of the origin and building of the towns of the province and the development of their rural setting* (Belfast, 1951), 34.

unclear exactly what the ‘money of O’Reilly’ was, but it was obviously some form of coinage—whether outright forgery in the sense of fraudulently claiming to be better metal than it appeared, or simple imitation of English coins—apparently issuing from somewhere in the vicinity of Cavan that could spark complaints from English merchants in Meath.¹⁰⁴ Gaelic lordships in Ulster participated in commerce according to both the North Atlantic and the Anglo–continental systems.

It is also clear that lordship played a strong role in all of this. The staple product along the north coast was preserved salmon. The fish were not caught at sea, unlike herring or cod (the other two staple fish of the North Atlantic) but in nets set in the rivers and estuaries in which they spawned, a process easily controlled by the lords who held the lands on which the nets were set. Again, unlike the more individualistic process of cod fishing, using long lines and a long process of wind-drying, or the sea-fishing of herring, the preservation of salmon was easily controlled. They would have been caught in large numbers at a time and preserving them required salt or vinegar. It was also totally dependent on imported materials, for neither salt nor wine vinegar could be produced economically in bulk in Ulster; it needed the foreign boats to bring them. Salmon fishing would have resulted in a close, symbiotic relationship between foreign ships, local communities and their lords. The establishing of formal weekly markets, held on specific days, might have arisen, and been maintained, by custom and through the efforts of the merchants, but it is much more probable that this was the result of wider commercial developments arising on the back of the waterborne trade. Weekly markets move commerce beyond fairs and the intermittent arrival of foreign ships into a permanent presence of traders, who were tempted to settle down at the market site and form a town.

The evidence for the influence of lordship comes from the castles and religious buildings set up in the new commercial centres, whether the fishing towns or an inland centre such as Cavan. Donegal, Rathmullan and Doe were principal seats of the major lords and are sited at important trading places. Ballyshannon is also at such a site but was also built as a marker of the southern border of O’Donnell power. Lifford was the main seat of O’Donnell power north of the Barnesmore Gap (the twin of Donegal) and is at the head of the Foyle navigation in a major fishing area; it was the site of one of the O’Donnell residences. On the eastern bank of the Foyle, as well as the settlement at Strabane, Turlough O’Neill constructed a castle at Dunalong, which he used to bring in galloglass soldiers from the Western Isles.¹⁰⁵ These seats of lordly power were established where the logic of the supply of fish and the presence of landing sites occurred; trade requirements had primacy. Trade came, and then the lords chose to site their castles to take advantage of it. This is much more likely than the reverse, that castles were built first and attracted trade, since commerce required a suitable place for anchorage. It is notable that Manus O’Donnell commented in 1552 that ships might come under sail to four of his houses.¹⁰⁶ The majority of the Gaelic lordships in late medieval Ulster were engaged, to some extent at least, in foreign trade. O’Connor of Sligo and O’Neill of Clandeboy benefited from Sligo and Carrickfergus. Magennis and O’Reilly founded their own planned towns at Newry and Cavan. O’Donnell, MacSweeney Fanad, MacSweeney Doe and the MacDonnells of Antrim were all directly involved in markets and the fish trade, while O’Cahan also participated if less directly. It seems unlikely that Maguire was untouched by the trade of Ballyshannon and the Erne. The lordship was not always secular, any more than it was in the rest of Europe: the town of Newry was founded and expanded under the protection of the abbots of the Cistercian abbey there. Again, we can see a negative relationship. Armagh, Coleraine and Derry might be expected to have been the sites of towns in the formal sense; Coleraine and Derry were both well-established centres of the salmon trade in particular. What they apparently lacked were local lords to protect and encourage them by bringing their wealth and business to the site. The Foyle, although well suited to develop sites may have

¹⁰⁴ Michael Dolley and Wilfred Seaby, “‘Le money del O Raylly’ (O’Reilly’s money)”, *British Numismatic Journal* 36 (1967) 114–17.

¹⁰⁵ William Roulston, *The parishes of Leckpatrick and Dunalong, their place in history* (Belfast, 2000).

¹⁰⁶ Brendan Bradshaw, ‘Manus “The Magnificent”: O’Donnell as Renaissance prince’, in Art Cosgrove and Donal McCartney, *Studies in Irish history presented to R. Dudley Edwards* (Dublin, 1979), 15–36: 18, citing TNA, SP61/4, [Detail of archival material], [Add date], no. 43.

suffered from a plethora of possibilities; as well as Derry, there was Dunnaalong, Strabane and Lifford, all competing.

We may put these conclusions into an economic and political narrative. In the thirteenth century, documents from the earldom of Ulster and the lordship of Connacht provide information on towns, such as Carrickfergus, Galway and Sligo; in the case of Carrickfergus this has been followed up by archaeological excavation. Without contemporary sources, dating these later developments is impossible. On the one hand, the North Atlantic trade in fish did not really get started on a large scale until the beginning of the fifteenth century. We have hints of commercial activity from this period in Ireland, but it is impossible to put together a comprehensive account. For example, ships were licensed in the first decade of the fifteenth century when merchants were assiduous in obtaining such permits to carry wine to Lough Foyle, Lough Swilly and to Newry.¹⁰⁷ Thereafter, the number of licences obtained decreases, though it is unlikely that trade did. We have some dates for the lordly element. Ballyshannon Castle was founded in 1423. Donegal was the creation of the first Red Hugh O'Donnell; he founded the friary in 1474–5 and the castle before his death in 1505. Rathmullan Friary was founded in 1516; Doe Castle is first noticed in 1544. In Co. Donegal, this is a process which started with trade during the first half of the fifteenth century and was then brought under the control of the lords. To the east, Ballycastle was established as a port and market during the second half of the sixteenth century, or before, followed closely by Dunluce before 1611. The fish trade developed over the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, expanding during the period, at least until the middle of the sixteenth: by this time, also we have the evidence from Newry and Cavan.

This aligns with the growing power of Ulster lordship. Katharine Simms' thesis followed the Irish sources, annals and praise poems, in their focus on the exercise of power.¹⁰⁸ We can see from this study more about the sources of the power. Building castles located power in a few places; control of the castle was a clear indication of control of the lordship. Founding a friary served the same purpose as founding a college elsewhere in Europe: it provided a dynastic burial place and a fund of prayers for members of the founding family after their death. However, these castles and friaries were built in places where the lords had located markets on the back of the fish trade. They gave the lords control and a source of crucial means to power. The militarisation Simms proposes required a concentration of resources, which she shows through their increasing control of land. It needed men, partly from their tenants, partly from the imported galloglasses, who were paid largely in land and the produce of land. It was different for weapons and armour; both needed to be imported and they were expensive. So, too, was entertaining, especially as wine became a necessary object of consumption.¹⁰⁹ We can see, in the study of commerce within their lands, how the Gaelic lords of the fifteenth century seized the opportunity of increased trade and fostered it, building on the more informal landing places to convert them into centres of commerce and settlement, even if only on a modest scale. The stakes were raised considerably in the sixteenth century when guns and ammunition became essential for an army. They were needed in great volume (particularly powder and shot), they were even more expensive than earlier weapons and they all had to be imported from outside Ireland. 'O'Donnell... hearing Spanish shippes that were come into Caledon (Killybegs) with Munition, Arms and Money, on the 10th of November he departed unto them'.¹¹⁰ We know nothing about the industry supplying arms to the soldiers of the fifteenth century in Ireland. Although spearheads and axes were presumably made in Ireland, good swords and armour may have been imported. The armies changed in kind and numbers as the wars in Ulster intensified during the second half of the sixteenth century; guns were now the essential weapon for the greater mass of men. It is difficult to see how Ireland could have produced the number of guns, along with the powder and shot, required to keep Hugh O'Neill's army supplied,

¹⁰⁷ Edward Tresham (ed.), *Rotulorum patentium et clausorum cancellariæ Hiberniæ calendarium*: Vol. I. Pars. I. Hen. II–Hen. VII (1 vol., Dublin, 1828), 172, 181; Deputy Keeper of the Records, *Calendar of patent rolls*, vol. 2, 31.

¹⁰⁸ Simms, *From kings to warlords*.

¹⁰⁹ Katharine Simms, 'Guesting and feasting in Gaelic Ireland', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 108 (1978), 67–100: 86–8.

¹¹⁰ W. Kelly, *Docwra's Derry*, 52.

along with those of O'Donnell and others. They would have had to be imported and paid for, which would have been by means of the commerce in fish and through the ports already serving it; presumably the volume of wine imported declined in proportion.

Commerce had become one of the essential sources of power. What we cannot do at this point is to make any suggestion as to how far the Gaelic lordships of Ulster became commercialised; how far the economy away from the fishing ports became involved. This is simply a question of sources, which do not exist in a form that would inform us of this. The final link between the commerce and politics of Gaelic lordship in Ulster came on 3 September 1607. On that day the earls of Tyrone, their friends and followers took ship for the continent from MacSweeney Fanad's port of Rathmullan.

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